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A Summer In the Black Forest

by
JIM SCHONE

From the moment I stepped off the plane in Luxembourg and onto the bus that would take me into West Germany, I knew I was in for the experience of a lifetime. It was May 29 and for the next three months, I was to spend the time working for the Baden-Wuerttemberg State Forest Service in the Black Forest of West Germany. I must admit, it was a dream come true.

It all started with involvement in an organization here on the Iowa State University campus called the Summer Trainee Exchange Program. There were ten ISU students from various academic fields, all wanting job experiences in West Germany. Through an agreement with the Berman Academic Exchange Service we would be assigned German jobs in our field of study if we could find jobs for German students in Iowa. The preliminary work started in October but it was not until late March that we had received our job offers and knew for sure that we would be spending the summer abroad. From then until the time I left O'Hare Airport, my time was spent busily preparing passport applications, reviewing my German, attending a traveler's courses and getting use to the idea that I was going to be working in an area that I had only dreamed of ever seeing.

Upon arrival in Germany, I realized how rusty my knowledge of their language really was. Although I have had six years of high school German, I have not kept up with it in college, so my rash review was not enough. The first days there were filled with many-nofond memories but at the time-frustrating experiences in trying to communicate with people. I was amazed by the large number of people who spoke English and spoke it quite well, but I had promised myself to avoid using it except in emergencies, so I struggled onwards.

My work papers stated that I was to meet my boss in Schopfheim which is in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg in the very southwestern corner of West Germany. It was at the town's train depot that I was met by a very courteous man in his Herman Forester's Uniform consisting of a green coat and knickers. I was so relieved to have finally reached my destination in one piece and although I was still among total strangers, I felt that I was with someone I could trust.

After a very pleasant introduction to the town, we left Schopfheim which is located near the Rhine River valley and traveled up into the hills of the Black Forest. I was struck by the tremendous beauty of the landscape.

I guess I would compare it to the Appalachians at least in size but quite different in vegetation. As I was to learn later, the Black Forest received its name from the extremely dense growth of White Fir and Norway Spruce that looks black in appearance. These two species along with European Beech were the main components of the forest in the area in which I was to work.

After a half-hour drive, we reached our destination which was a small agricultural village nestled in amongst the hills call Hasel. They had arranged for me to stay with a family in Hasel which is where I would be working. It was with this family that I experienced my closes contact with the German people. There were three children, all about my age, still living at home. They took me in with open arms and through the course of the summer, I felt like I became part of the family. They included me in all their activities and much of what I learned that summer was from the times I spent with them.

I had one evening to get settled in my new home before my first day of work was to begin. I admit it was quite a restless night thinking of what lay ahead but it was not long before the sun rose above the hills of the Black Forest and it was time to get ready. That morning, I was treated to a breakfast of coffee and fresh baked bread with homemade jam. This was to become my regular morning meal for the rest of the summer.

That first day, I was assigned to a five-man logging crew with four forestry apprentices, again all about my age, and one supervisor. The work usually centered right around Hasel, so we did not have to travel too far to the work areas. After a few friendly introductions to the rest of the crew, we were set to begin. The entire first week of work consisted of debarking the White Fir trees that the supervisor felled. In trying to understand the reasoning behind this hard work that was done with a tool that looked like a long-handled spatula, I came to realize that if the bark was left on, insects would attack the downed tree. These pests have a habit of working their way into the wood and decreasing it quality. With debarking, they can reduce the number of insects attacking the log, decreasing the potential economic loss. It was in this first experience that I faced what was to become my greatest frustration of the summer: not having a good enough command of the language to fully understand the technical reasoning behind the things that they did in the forest. This frustration

provided excellent motivation for me to work on my German, and still manage to learn a great deal about their practices.

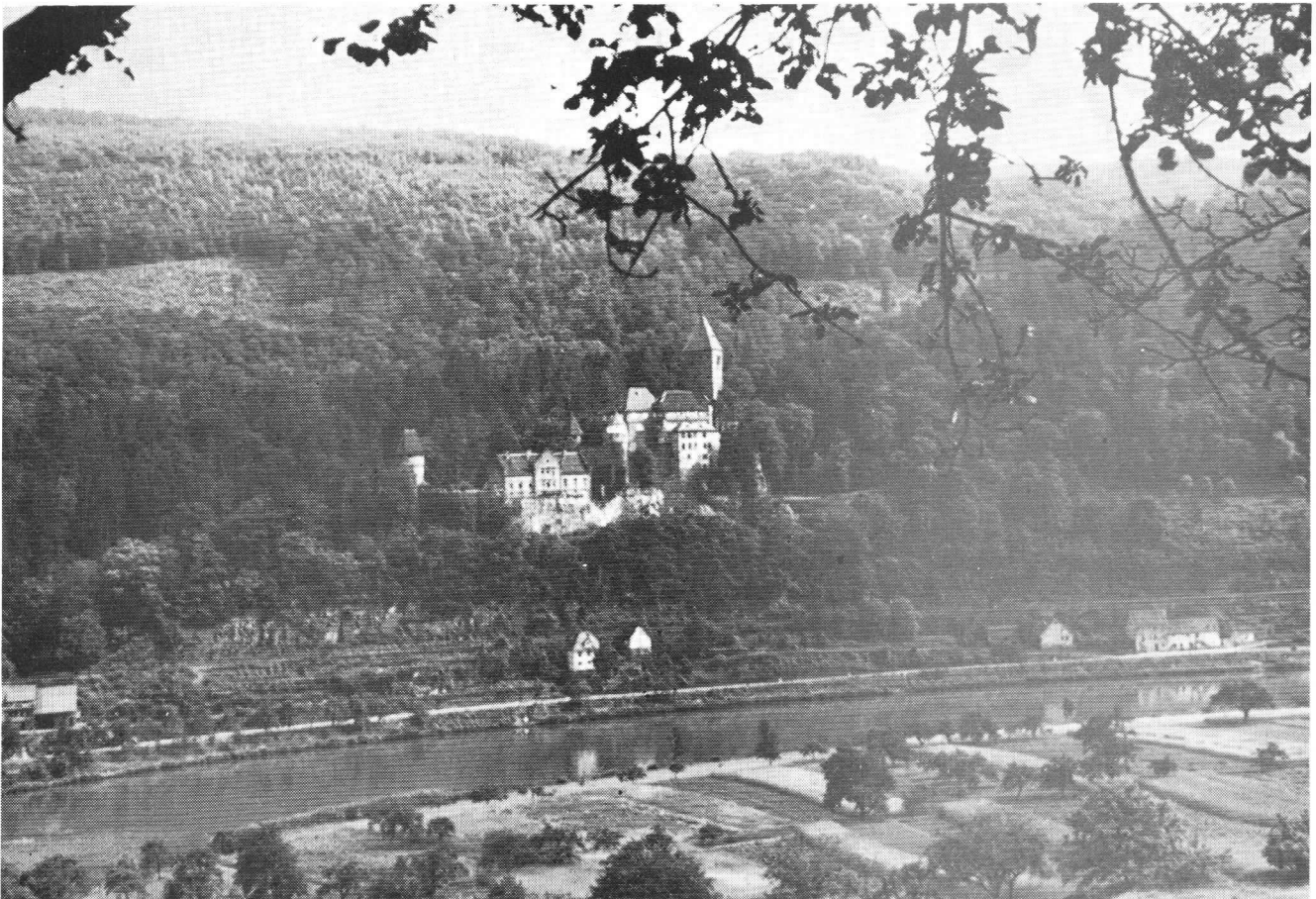
Throughout the summer, they never let me get bored with any one activity. Almost every week the crew moved on to something new. After the debarking, we started on some thinning work in stands of Norway Spruce. Later activities included such things as competition control in areas that had been clearcut and replanted with White Fir seedlings, log transport of trees that had been damaged or knocked down during heavy snowfalls, road surveying and road maintenance. While doing all these jobs I was able to get a good look at their forests and forestry practices.

I guess what struck as the most interesting was the intensity of their operations. The head forester in the district spent a day with me explaining his part of the Black Forest and what they were trying to do with it. He showed me a map of the entire area with age class and stand descriptions for every hectare of their forest land. The records from which this information comes date all the way back to 1830! With such a small land base, West Germany itself is about the size of Oregon, the Germans

have to get as much as possible out of what they have and their forestry practices reflect this philosophy.

It is impossible for me to recount all of my experiences here, as I could go on forever. When the time came, it was extremely difficult for me to leave Hasel and all the wonderful people that I had come to know. Each and every day of the summer had been a tremendous learning experience, and after three months I felt as though I had only touched the surface. In looking back now I realize that I learned a great deal about Germany and its people, but I also learned a lot about my own country in seeing it from a new and totally different perspective. It was an experience that I wish everyone could share.

Jim Schone is a student at Iowa State University and is majoring in both Forest Management and Business Administration.



Castle and "Forstant" Zwingenberg at the Neckar.